

Becoming Like Jesus

Diving into the details of spiritual growth; kill sin before it kills us... (Gal. 5:19-23) (thinking, feeling, will, inter-dimensions) see Prov. 4:23; Ps. 139:23

Sunday, March 2, 2025

Manuscript

Prayer

Pastor Bobby has been teaching on the subject of “Being with Jesus.” I was considering what to teach next when Bobby mentioned that I might continue his series. I was teaching Matthew’s gospel, but interest seemed to wane. So, I am picking up on “Becoming Like Jesus.”

The outline of the next few months is as follows:

March: Becoming Like Him: Breakdown of Spiritual Disciplines

- March 2: Diving into the details of spiritual growth; kill sin before it kills us... (Gal. 5:19-23) (thinking, feeling, will, inter-dimensions)
- March 9: Spiritual disciplines: Prayer, worship, evangelism
- March 16: Spiritual disciplines: serving, stewardship, fasting
- March 23: Spiritual disciplines: silence, solitude...
- March 30: Spiritual disciplines: journaling, wrap-up this section

April: Learning What He Says: spiritual discipline of learning

- April 6: Diving into the details of study; mine for truth (James 1:19ff; 2 Tim. 2:15; Psalm 119)
- April 13: Hermeneutics overview (Psalm 119:9-11 as springboard)
- April 20: Key Hermeneutical Fallacies- part 1 (Jer. 29:11 as example)
- April 27: Key Hermeneutical Fallacies- part 2

May: Arrange Your Affairs Around Him (Doing all He says) (sin is not an irresistible force...)

- May 4: Romans 7 and Romans 8:1
- May 11: John 15:1-5
- May 18: 1 Cor. 9:19-27
- May 25: Gal 2:20; Eph. 5:18-32

I tried to outline the series in order to plan my teaching, but we may take detours along the way. While I am pretty confident of my plans for March and April, each lesson in May could change some. However, they will fall under the heading “Arrange Your Affairs Around Him.”

Today’s theme:

Becoming like Him means diving into the details of spiritual growth.

This must include the inner-dimensions of the person.

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I. The details of spiritual growth

a. Galatians 5:19–26 (ESV)

b. *¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

c. *²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.*

d. I believe becoming like Jesus means focusing on the details of spiritual growth.

e. But most pastors, including myself, do not focus on the details enough. Many times, we do not focus on the details at all.

f. There are certain preachers that will say all the right things. I know that you will love them, but there is little substance to what they are saying. In a way, they are making your ears tickle. In 2 Tim. 4:3, we are warned about preaching, which makes people's ears tickle. I usually apply that to a preacher that condones sin, and will not preach the Bible. But, I wonder if this might also apply to saying what people want to hear but not giving depth of life change. For example:

i. Don't commit sexual immorality, but how?

ii. Trust God, but how?

iii. Submit to God, but how?

iv. Don't live according to the flesh, but how?

v. We could go on and on...

g. Recently, Vice President J.D. Vance spoke at the European Union. He said some really good things, but do you know what he did not address? He did not address abortion. Vice President J.D. Vance is pro-family, but not pro-life. I fear that many Christians are not recognizing the difference. To do so, we must get into the details of subjects.

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- h. How does that apply to the Christian life? To me, Vice President J.D. Vance shared things that his conservative base wants to hear.
- i. The topic of spiritual growth has always been important to me. However, the idea of “knowing God in the details” is an increasing passion of mine. Tim Keller’s writings especially help me with this. A few months ago I shared this in a sermon:
- j. *I think John White in his book, [The Fight](#), says if you lift up the top of a piano and you sing a particular note into it (say, a B), all the strings will stay quiet but the B string will vibrate, and when you’re done, you’ll hear an echo because there is something in that string that matches your voice.*
- k. *The Devil cannot make you do things, but the Devil finds strings in there. He finds chords. He finds things he can play a number on, and that’s the reason why there is a tendency for Christians ... I think I said this a couple of weeks ago ... because you underestimate the compulsive and deep side of sin in your life, you believe that addictions, and you very often believe despair and depression and all kinds of these terrible, awful things that can really wreck and ruin your life, must be from the outside.*
- l. *“My parents did it to me. The Devil did it to me. My chemicals are doing it to me,” but it couldn’t just be because I have taken my own sinful, selfish pride and I have played right into its hand. The flesh is that devious, and the flesh is that strong, but the point is, the Devil and the flesh are always involved together. You can never say, “The Devil did this to me.” I really think that’s superstitious Christianity, but it’s substitious to believe he’s not involved. It’s substitious to believe he’s not out there playing a beautiful sonata on the strings you gave him.¹*
- m. Tim Keller shares the following. He was in a sermon on Gen. 4:7 when God tells Cain that sin is “crouching” at his door with a desire to overtake him:
- n. *What does it mean to crouch down? Crouching down means one of two things. You crouch down, first of all, so the person won’t see you at all, or if they do see you, they’ll think you’re very small and not big...*
- o. *When God says, “... sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it,” what he’s saying is we tend to walk on a razor’s*

¹ Timothy J. Keller, [The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive](#) (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

edge. In the very, very earliest stages of self-pity, in the very earliest stages of bitterness, in the very earliest stages of pride or of prejudice, in the very earliest stages of greed, in the very earliest stages of some sort of addiction, in the very earliest stages, sin ... you actually still have some control.

- p. You know what's going on. You really do. You can do something about it, but he says (here's what's interesting) when you give in to the greed, to the self-pity, to the prejudice, to the pride, to the selfishness, when you give in to the thoughts and the words and the deeds you shouldn't ... Sin is not just really a matter of just something that goes off into the air. Sin is not just a matter of personal choice. Sin is a power.*
- q. When you do a sin, it creates a force in your life. It creates a being. It takes shape. Isn't this astounding? Do you think this is just metaphorical, when God says, "It wants to have you"? So the point is you give in to selfishness, you give in to pride, you give in to dishonesty, you give in to greed, you give in to these sorts of things, and next thing you know, you have created something in your life that shadows you.*
- r. In fact, almost literally, here's what God says. He says, "If you do sin, sin will do you. Right now, you're in a position where you can perform sin, but it won't be long before it will come back, and it will have you. It will want you." How can he talk about sin as if it's an agent? The answer is because it has that kind of power in our lives.*
- s. Sin is not just something you do; it's a power. Here's what he's saying. He's saying it starts small, but it's not long before it's just taking you out. Gossips will find themselves being gossiped about. Haters will find themselves being hated. Cowards will be deserted. "Those who live by the sword will die by the sword." People who will do anything to be popular will be the most unpopular people. Who would want somebody like that, no principles?*
- t. Do you know your crouching sins?*
- u. By definition, the things in your life right now that can most destroy you are the things you don't think are that bad, the things you've been making excuses for. Let me give you a couple more examples. "I'm not a workaholic; I'm just productive. I'm not ruthless; I just have sharp business sense. I'm not stingy; I'm just prudent. I'm not bitter against the opposite sex; I'm just experiencing righteous moral outrage."*

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- v. *In other words, sin always crouches down, but here's what I want you to know. It will poison you. It will have you. You can't stay bitter against the opposite sex without it hardening you and poisoning you and distorting your ability to assess individuals. It will screw you up. You can decide, "I'm going to stay bitter at my parents," but it won't be long before it will uncoil. It will poison you, and it will harden you, and it will embitter you in all sorts of ways you won't even see. Of course, because that's what it means to have you.*
 - w. *There's nobody more under the power of something than someone who doesn't know they're under anybody's power. Do you know your crouching sins? Or do you think I'm exaggerating? If you do, you're so vulnerable. Do you know what they are? So the first thing we learn is sin is always a factor east of Eden. Sin is dangerous. Sin is powerful. Sin is subtle. Sin is nuanced. Sin is complex. Sin is hidden. It's always hiding itself, and it's always a factor. It's always a problem. It's always involved.²*
 - x. We must focus on the details of spiritual growth.
 - y. John Owen was a puritan writer. One writes:
 - z. *John Owen famously warns Christians, "Be killing sin or it will be killing you." His book *The Mortification of Sin* is an exposition of [Romans 8:13](#): "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Though Christians cannot eliminate sin in this life, Owen encourages us to diligently fight sinful desires and put them to death.³*
- II. We must focus on the inner-dimensions of the person.
- a. To look at this I pulled out Dallas Willard's book, "Renovation of the Heart."

² Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

³ Gospel Coalition article on April 25, 2022 "John Owen's 9 Instructions for Killing Sin" <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/john-owen-killing-sin/>

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- b. Willard does a great job breaking down the inner dimensions of the person.
- c. Dallas Willard shares:
- d. *The author Oscar Wilde once remarked that by the age of forty everyone has the face they deserve. This is a truly profound, if painful, truth. But it really applies to the “within” expressed by the face—to the heart and also the soul, and not to the face merely as one surface area of the body. Otherwise it would not much matter. Now, right on the conscious surface of our “world within” lie some of our thoughts, feelings, intentions, and plans. These are the ones we are aware of. They may be fairly obvious to others as well as to ourselves. In terms of them we consciously approach our world and our actions within it.*⁴
- e. Still from Willard:
- f. *THE SIX BASIC ASPECTS OF A HUMAN LIFE NOW*
 - i. *Thought (images, concepts, judgments, inferences)*
 - ii. *Feeling (sensation, emotion)*
 - iii. *Choice (will, decision, character)*
 - iv. *Body (action, interaction with the physical world)*
 - v. *Social context (personal and structural relations to others)*
 - vi. *Soul (the factor that integrates all of the above to form one life)*⁵
- g. *In the life away from God, the order of dominance is:*
 - i. *Body*
 - ii. *Soul*
 - iii. *Mind (Thought/Feeling)*
 - iv. *Spirit*
 - v. *God*
- h. *In the life under God, by contrast, the order of dominance is:*
 - i. *God*

⁴ Willard, Dallas. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting On the Character of Christ* (pp. 16-17). (Function). Kindle Edition.

⁵ Willard, Dallas. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting On the Character of Christ* (pp. 30-31). (Function). Kindle Edition.

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- ii. *Spirit*
 - iii. *Mind (Thought/Feeling)*
 - iv. *Soul*
 - v. *Body*⁶
- i. Further from Willard:
 - j. *It is the central point of this book that spiritual transformation only happens as each essential dimension of the human being is transformed to Christlikeness under the direction of a regenerate will interacting with constant overtures of grace from God. Such transformation is not the result of mere human effort and cannot be accomplished by putting pressure on the will (heart, spirit) alone.*⁷
 - k. Willard picks up on Tolstoy:
 - l. *In the course of events, however, Tolstoy became involved in the life of the Russian peasants.*
 - m. *I saw that the whole life of these people was passed in heavy labor, and that they were content with life. . . . And they all—endlessly different in their manners, minds, education, and position, as they were—all alike, in complete contrast to my ignorance, knew the meaning of life and death, labored quietly, endured deprivations and sufferings, and lived and died seeing therein not vanity but good.*
 - n. *The peasants whom Tolstoy admired so much were not yet swallowed up in modernity. They had solid traditions of faith and community that provided a ritual form of life—and of death. The result was that they knew what was good to do without regard to their feelings. Good was not determined for them by how they “felt” or by what they thought was “the best deal.”*⁸

⁶ Willard, Dallas. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting On the Character of Christ* (pp. 40-41). (Function). Kindle Edition.

⁷ Willard, Dallas. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting On the Character of Christ* (pp. 41-42). (Function). Kindle Edition.

⁸ Willard, Dallas. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting On the Character of Christ* (pp. 126-127). (Function). Kindle Edition.

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III. How:

- a. The how is being active in the spiritual disciplines. However, the spiritual disciplines must include the whole person.
- b. As a summary, I believe the spiritual life encompasses what I shared from Willard:
 - i. *Thought (images, concepts, judgments, inferences)*
 - ii. *Feeling (sensation, emotion)*
 - iii. *Choice (will, decision, character)*
 - iv. *Body (action, interaction with the physical world)*
 - v. *Social context (personal and structural relations to others)*
 - vi. *Soul (the factor that integrates all of the above to form one life)*⁹
- c. Willard goes much deeper through his book, which I commend to you.
- d. Matthew 22:36–40 (ESV)
- e. ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”
- f. We must love God with our whole being.
- g. Romans 12:1–2 (ESV)
- h. *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*
- i. We must sanctify our thoughts: Phil. 4:8: *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

⁹ Willard, Dallas. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting On the Character of Christ* (pp. 30-31). (Function). Kindle Edition.

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- j. Colossians 3:1–4 (ESV)
- k. *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*
- l. We have feelings/emotions and we must be emotionally healthy Christians:
- m. We have emotions such as anger, joy, etc...
- n. Ephesians 4:30–32 (ESV)
- o. *³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*
- p. Ecc. 3: there is a time for grief...
- q. We have choice.
- r. We have a body and the body is important in the spiritual life...
- s. We have a social context: Willard shares: *The human self requires rootedness in others. This is primarily an ontological matter—a matter of being what we are. It is not just a moral matter, a matter of what ought to be. And the moral aspect of it grows out of the ontological.*¹⁰
 - i. See Prov. 27:17
 - ii. Ecc. 4:12
 - iii. Heb. 10:24-25
 - iv. 1 Cor. 12
 - v. Rom. 12
- t. We have a soul.
- u. All of these aspects are important to the details of spiritual growth.

¹⁰ Willard, Dallas. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting On the Character of Christ* (p. 36). (Function). Kindle Edition.

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Next week we will build on spiritual disciplines.